

MBC – 4/24/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“That the Truth of the Gospel Might Be Preserved for You”
 Galatians 2:1–14

Let’s review where we are in Galatians: Within a year of Paul preaching the Gospel and establishing churches in Galatia, false teachers, with a false gospel had crept in and lured away many from the truth. We call them Judaizers. They were Jews who claimed to be Christians, but they were not. They insisted that Christians must keep the Law of Moses: i.e., they had to be Jews before they could be Christians. They hated Paul and his Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, alone.

- So they were on a campaign to discredit Paul’s authority as an Apostle: they said he was just a johnny-come-lately. He wasn’t one of the original 12. He didn’t have the stamp of approval from the Jerusalem Apostles. We need to add here, that neither did these false teachers! They claimed to be representing the Jerusalem Apostles, but they weren’t.

So Paul launches into this letter by saying: “Jesus made me His Apostle, and Jesus gave me the Gospel. There is only one Gospel, and it is not man’s Gospel!” And then he makes two points: 1.) His gospel is **independent** of the other Apostles – he didn’t receive it from them, they were not his teachers – he received it directly from Jesus Christ, by revelation. But his second point equally important: 2.) His gospel is **identical** to that of the other Apostles. It’s independent of them, but identical with theirs because there is only one true Gospel, and it’s not man’s Gospel, but God’s. So let’s pick it up in—

- Galatians 2:1–10 ¹Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²*I went up because of a revelation* (a revelation from Jesus) and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, **so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.** ⁶And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸(for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.
- ¹¹But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹²For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that **their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel**, I said

to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

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I want you to imagine with me that you came down with a bad cold – really bad (maybe it was COVID? My computer came down with a virus the other day, and Erroll thought it was probably COVID) Anyway, your cold passed, but left you without your voice. You can’t talk to your unsaved neighbors, and you can’t share the Gospel with them in words. All they can do is look at your life to get an idea of what the Good News *is*, and what it *does* to a person: So after many months of looking at your life, what would they think the Gospel is all about?

- Would they say: “Well the Gospel must be a list of rules that you have to keep religiously, and meetings you have to attend – and you have to dress weird, and wear your hair a certain way – and they took down their satellite dish, so no TV. . . and my neighbor isn’t very friendly but seems to spend a lot of time with other people in their church – so yeah, I guess that’s the Gospel, it’s like a serious club with a lot of rules.”
- Or would they look at your life and say: “Well, I have heard my neighbor is a Christian – I’ve seen the fish sticker on their car, but honestly, I don’t really see any difference in their life: They still have their satellite, as a matter of fact, I caught them stealing my wi-fi! I hear them arguing a lot – they don’t seem very happy. So I guess the Gospel is just something you believe, it’s like a philosophy, but it doesn’t actually change the way you live.”
- Or would they look at your life and say, “I know my neighbor isn’t perfect, and they have their share of trials, but they are always friendly to me – even though I don’t go to their church – and they are always having their church friends over for Bible studies and pot-lucks – I can hear them singing! And honestly, they’ve invited me many times. A couple of times when I told them about a problem, they said they would pray for me. You know, I don’t own a Bible, but I’m thinking about going to one of their Bible studies things?”

*The Gospel is a message that must be communicated in words. But we can reinforce that message and make it attractive and winsome by our lives. Or we can distort the Gospel message and make it confusing, or even completely mis-communicate it – by our lives. *When people look at your life, what does it say about the Gospel?*

We’re going to see this morning examples of behavior that preserved the truth of the Gospel, and behavior that distorted the truth of the Gospel.

II. Preserving Gospel truth.

A. A revelation of Jesus for the sake of the Gospel.

- Galatians 2:1–10 ¹Then after fourteen years (14 years from his last brief visit with Peter in Jerusalem) I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²*I went up because of a revelation* (A revelation from Jesus. Jesus told Paul to go.) and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

In the NT, when Jesus makes a personal appearance, after His resurrection, it's about something *really* important! In Acts, the few times Jesus appeared, it always had to do with the Gospel. And when Jesus appeared to Paul and told him to go to Jerusalem, it had to do with the Gospel. Jesus was very concerned that there was no doubt about the Gospel message and the Gospel messengers—

- In v.2, Paul didn't need reassurance that he had the right message – he wanted to make sure the other Apostles had the right message! Jesus had given him the Gospel from heaven. If you remember from our last study, immediately after Jesus saved him, he went to the Arabian desert for 3 years to digest what had happened to him, and it was during this time that Jesus instructed Paul in the Gospel. Someone said that “Paul went to Arabian desert with the Law and the Prophets, and came out with Romans and Galatians!”
- It was **Jesus Himself** who wanted to clear up any confusion, caused by these false teachers. So *Jesus* told Paul to go –for the sake of the Gospel: **“that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.”**

The Gospel is a specific, definable message. And it is a *powerful* message but it is also a very *delicate* message in that you can't tweak it, or mess with it, without destroying it. Many Christians today say that we need to accommodate and contextualize the Gospel to make it reasonable and understandable to our modern society. “People don't understand blood atonement, don't talk about sin and God's wrath. Just make sure that people know that *“He gets us.”*”

- They say, “Let's stop fighting over doctrine and just appreciate the “richness of diversity among our various traditions.” Sounds humble, doesn't it? What it means is: “Let's accept logical contradictions. Let's make truth relative.” It's cowardly. It's just a way to avoid confrontation.
- But in 47 A.D., when the Gospel message was getting blurry – **Jesus** came down from heaven to confront the issue and clear things up! It was that important – and it still is. Martin Luther said, Yes, when it comes to love, be soft, but when it comes to the Gospel, don't give an inch. Be as hard as a stone. He said, “God assisting me, my forehead shall be more hard than all men's foreheads. I give place to none. . .Yea I am glad even with all my heart in this point to seem rebellious and obstinate, stout and stern.”

When it comes to the Gospel message, there is no wiggle room. Be as correct and precise as you can be, and yes, get up in the grill of anyone who tries to alter it. And to summarize what happened when Paul went to visit the Jerusalem Apostles, they affirmed Paul and his message, and even his ministry to the Gentiles – 100%. They gave the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. And the Gospel continued to go into all the world – and here we are this morning! All because the truth of the Gospel was preserved for you! Now let's look at

B. Titus – an illustration of freedom from the law.

So Paul took two companions with him on this assignment from Jesus, Barnabas, the Son of Comfort, and Titus, a Gentile Christian, who later pastored the church in Crete. Now the whole issue that Paul is going to confront is the issue of Gentiles and salvation, right? So Paul deliberately took Titus, a Gentile as a test case – to force the issue of whether the Judaizers were right.

In Acts 15:1 they said “*Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.*” I.e., they would say Titus wasn’t saved. So Paul says, “Well here is *brother* Titus, a fine young Christian man! So it’s time to put up or shut up.” What would the other Apostles say? And then we read this—

- Galatians 2:3–5 ³But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that *the truth of the gospel* might be preserved for you.

So when Paul, Barnabas, and Titus arrived, the Judaizers demanded that Titus be circumcised – and if he wasn’t, then he wasn’t a Christian. Paul said, “*Over my dead body.*” And then he looked at Peter, James, and John, and said, “Guys?” And they said, “We’re with Paul. Jesus has shown us too, that man, woman, Jew, Gentile, slave or free, salvation comes by trusting in Jesus Christ alone, not by any law-keeping.” And shortly after, at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, they made it official for all the church until Jesus comes back.

- But Paul couldn’t yield in submission to these legalists for even a moment, or the Gospel would have been lost. Christianity would have become just another works-based, human religion.

Beloved, we *fight* for the truth of the Gospel! It’s a hill to die on. When someone says, “Yes, trust in Jesus, but you also must keep the Sabbath to be saved.” You say, “*Over my dead body.*” When someone else says, “Yes, trust in Jesus, but your good works will also play a part in your final justification.” You say, “*Over my dead body.*”

But here we need to take a minute to consider another situation, and another travelling companion of Paul, and another completely different outcome when the issue of circumcision came up—

C. Timothy – an illustration of the law of love.

II. A concession for the sake of the Gospel. (Acts 16:1-3)

- Acts 16:1–5 ¹Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

He circumcised Timothy! What? Luke just states this matter-of-factly, but what is up with this? By now, they’ve settled this issue at the Jerusalem Council: Gentiles do *not* need to be circumcised to be saved – *no one* needs to be circumcised to be saved! Salvation comes to anyone through trusting in Jesus. And Paul and Timothy are going to be delivering this incredible news to the churches—

- Acts 16:4 ⁴As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.

But if you remember, the decision of the Jerusalem Council was two-fold: 1.) Gentiles are not under the Law of Moses. They do not have to be circumcised or keep the Sabbath or dietary laws to be saved. But 2.) The council instructed all believers to be sensitive to Jewish believers who still felt obligated to keep the Jewish laws. In Rom.14, Paul called them weaker brothers. Don't rub their faces in your freedom. Christian love trumps Christian freedom.

But again, why in the world did Paul insist on circumcising Timothy, a grown man? Doesn't this sound like a contradiction – like Paul was intimidated into doing what he preached against?

- Here's the situation: Titus and Timothy were different: Titus was a full-on Gentile. Timothy had a Gentile father – who didn't circumcise his son – and a godly *Jewish* mother, so according to the rabbis, Timothy was regarded as a Jew. He was brought up as a Jew until he became a Christian along with his mom and grandma. The Jerusalem Council said no one has to be circumcised for salvation, but it didn't say that Jewish Christians had to abandon their Jewish traditions. Jewish-Christian fathers could still circumcise their sons. No problem with that, unless they did it for salvation. That would have contradicted the Gospel.

So here is Paul getting ready to head out on his second missionary journey. Once again, he would be going to larger cities, and as he always did, preaching first in the *synagogues to unsaved Jews*. And who would be at his side? Timothy, an uncircumcised Jew. And Luke says that everyone knew it. How would the Jews have handled that? They would have put their hands over their ears. All they would have seen was this Jew who was disobeying God in the name of this Jesus. Timothy would have been a stumbling block and a distraction to the Gospel.

Paul could have said to the Jews, "If you don't like it you can lump it! I've got the letter right here that says so!" But for the sake of love, and evangelism, he laid aside this freedom, and had Timothy circumcised to avoid the distraction. Paul had written to the Galatians shortly before this—

- Galatians 6:15 ¹⁵For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Beloved, he is saying here we have Gospel *freedom* to circumcise or not, worship on Sunday or Saturday, eat Kosher – or not. Freedom! As long as we don't make these things matters of the Gospel and impose them on others. And where we have Gospel freedom, we ask what will bring the most glory to God, and what does love require? Because love always trumps freedom. Timothy paid a high price to prioritize love over his freedom. But Paul himself lived like this—

- 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 ¹⁹For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. (That's exactly why he circumcised Timothy) ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

Now, let's go back to Galatians because tells this story about confronting Peter – one of the pillars – on the very same issue of the Gospel.

III. Protecting Gospel behavior.

- ¹¹But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (That’s pretty heavy language, isn’t it? Paul confronted the lead Apostle, Peter, the Rock? It must have been a very important issue, and it was, this was not some grey area.) ¹²For before certain men came from James (Judaizers – and I think they just *said* they were sent by James) he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But when I saw that **their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Here's what happened: Peter was having Christian fellowship with the believers in Antioch – this was a mostly *Gentile* church, but he was eating *with* these brothers and sisters, and he was eating *what* they were eating – no problem – he understands that in Christ there is no more clean/unclean, in food or in people. Gentiles don’t have to live like Jews – and what’s more, he as a Jew was free to live like a Gentile! So he’s havin’ a good old time: bacon, shrimp, carnitas – and he’s loving it all.

- But then, Peter catches wind that some of these Jewish legalists are in town. He knows that they will judge him for acting like a Gentile, so he quick brushes his teeth and gargles with Listerine—and worst of all, he, Barnabas, and the other Jews there, *shunned* their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ! Turned their backs on them: “Oh no, we weren’t eating with those people. What would give you that idea?” Can you imagine how that must have hurt those believers? Being treated like they were still unclean – second class – like they weren’t really one in Christ.

What happened? Even Peter—the Rock—was intimidated by legalism: Even good old Barnabas caved into these men. Amazing. The pull of legalism is so powerful and so intimidating! No one wants to be judged for not being spiritual! Some of you know what that’s like. It’s not pretty.

And this was so serious that Paul had to get right in Peter’s face: What Peter did was **“not in step with the truth of the gospel.”** I.e., Out of synch with the Gospel. His actions were speaking louder than his words, and his actions were telling a lie about the Gospel!

- I want you to get this: whenever we make distinctions in the body of Christ – some rank higher or are worth more to the church because of their race or their money – OR – some are closer to Jesus, they are more spiritual because they live by a higher standard – all of that *lies* about the Gospel. Racism and favoritism lie about the Gospel because the Gospel proclaims—
- Galatians 3:28 ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Don’t ever believe that legalism is just annoying – no, it distorts the truth about the Gospel: Does God require anything in addition to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ to be made right with Him? No. “All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” “There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

But legalism says, “Yes – but also there are some other unwritten rules, and if you really love Jesus – you will keep these rules too.” In the book we are studying on Thursday nights, the author told this story—

- “Evangelicals are best known in Las Mesetas for their strict observance of rules such as no drinking, no dancing, no drugs and no smoking. Members are required to tithe their earnings and attend all church services - six or seven nights a week in most churches. Churches will not baptize anyone in a common-law marriage (the status of thirty-eight percent of the households in Las Mesetas). Some churches prohibit men from wearing jeans or shorts. Most churches do not allow women to wear pants, shorts or short skirts. They also prohibit women from wearing jewelry, using makeup or cutting their hair. A number of churches require women to wear head coverings in church.... Legalism certainly helps some people not to drink, but it also forces people to live with questions and burdens like (get this) ... when a woman in Las Mesetas said to me, *“My friend told me that I have lost my salvation since I cut my hair.”* (from *Holiness By Grace*, p.117)

Do you see how legalism lies about the truth of the Gospel? What that woman was told was no different than those 1st Judaizers telling Gentiles that they couldn’t be saved unless they were circumcised.

- A few years ago, I was teaching a class at TCS – I had Russians and Ukrainian students in my class, and of the those men told the story of a well-known pastor doing a conference for Slavic Christians in Sacramento. During a break, a group of them cornered this pastor and asked him why he didn’t condemn smoking as a sin. He said, “Because the Bible doesn’t call it a sin.” But they kept on him about this, especially about smoking until finally they wore him down and he said, “Ok, smoking cigarettes is a sin!” And my student said, “All the people cheered!” And he was laughing about it. I wasn’t laughing. I said, “That’s terrible. That lies about the Gospel. Shame on that pastor for caving into legalism.” The Gospel is *not* about whether you smoke or drink or have tattoos, or you do or don’t homeschool your kids or watch TV. And we might never say that, but by our actions, do we give the impression that a person’s acceptance with God really *does* depend upon keeping these non-biblical rules?

When Paul refused to circumcise Titus, the truth of the Gospel was preserved – for us today! And when Paul did have Timothy circumcised for the sake of love, the freedom of the Gospel was preserved. But when Peter played the hypocrite and shunned his Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ, he was out of step with the truth of the Gospel.

Think about this: The Judaizers were unsaved, but Peter’s actions show us that even believers – even Apostles – can fall for the intimidation of legalism. And if all those people in Antioch had been Peter’s example – they would have completely misunderstood the Gospel, right?

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Beloved, we need to get the Gospel right! In our heads and in our hearts, in our belief, and also in our behavior. Does your life show off the mercy and grace of God toward a sinner? Do people look at you and see someone who has been set free from guilt and despair?

And, do they see someone who has been set free from the power and addictions of sin, by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or someone who is still enslaved? Beloved, the Gospel sets us free from the guilt and penalty of sin, and it also sets us free from the dominating power of sin.

Does your life show that? *When people look at your life, what does it say about the Gospel?*